United Nations A/58/64

General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 February 2003

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Item 131 of the preliminary list*
Joint Inspection Unit

Joint Inspection Unit

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with article 9, paragraph 2, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the programme of work of the Unit for 2003 (see annex).

* A/58/50.

03-26470 (E) 110303

Annex

Programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2003

I. Introduction

1. The following programme of work has been drawn up in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 31/192 of 22 December 1976. It takes into account the guidelines laid out in successive Assembly resolutions on the functioning of the Unit, in particular resolutions 50/233 of 7 June 1996, 54/16 of 29 October 1999, 56/245 of 24 December 2001 and 57/284 of 20 December 2002. As hitherto, the programme of work is subject to change in the course of the year: new reports may be added; planned reports may be modified, postponed or cancelled when circumstances so warrant; and titles may be changed to reflect the new thrust of reports.

2 As indicated in the programme of work for 2002 (A/57/61, annex, para. 2) and in response to a request by the General Assembly for the Unit to improve the presentation of the preliminary listing "by providing information on the source, including legislative basis, objectives, problems to be addressed, duration and expected date of completion, and to present such information before the final quarter of each year" (resolution 56/245, para. 5), the Unit will issue the listing of potential reports for the following year and beyond as a separate document.

II. Programme of work for 2003

A. Harmonization of administrative practices and entitlements for staff of the United Nations system serving at field duty stations

3. As indicated in its preliminary listing of potential reports and notes for 2003 and beyond (A/57/321, para. 11) the Unit will carry out a review of administrative practices and entitlements for staff serving at field duty stations, based on a suggestion made by the United Nations Secretariat (specifically, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). The Unit will review possible discrepancies in the terms and conditions of service, entitlements and compensation packages of United Nations staff serving in the field and those of other United Nations operational agencies. Currently, it appears that administrative differences exist among the common system organizations, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as the United Nations Secretariat. Those potential discrepancies relate to such aspects as assigned duty station, rest and recuperation entitlements for staff serving in hardship duty stations and compensation packages. The review will take into account the terms and conditions of United Nations staff, as established by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the International Civil Service Commission.

B. Review of human resources management in the United Nations system (a series of four reports)

4. In its preliminary listing, the Joint Inspection Unit also reported its intention to undertake a sequential series of four reports on human resources management in the United Nations system, based on an earlier suggestion by the World Health Organization (WHO). Since then, the Secretary-General has put forward his agenda for further change of the United Nations, emphasizing the need for fundamental reforms in human resources management. The new initiatives he presented are, inter alia, intended to: encourage and reward mobility between different locations, functions and even organizations; expand opportunities open to staff in the General Service category; rejuvenate the Organization; further empower managers; improve the system of internal justice; and enable the United Nations to offer more competitive conditions of service. The Unit, which shares the sense of urgency which is attached by the Secretary-General and other executive heads of organizations in the system to reforming the way in which they manage their human resources, considers it important to prepare the following four reports simultaneously, as the issues they cover are closely interlinked.

Part One: Post structure and related appointments

5. The structure of posts and the types of appointments related to those posts should be determined, in any organization, by its mandate, overall personnel policy, available resources and the prevailing trends in the labour market, and organizations are striving to find the optimal balance among the different types of appointments (e.g., indefinite or continuing, short-term) which would allow them to fulfil their mission and attain their objectives. The first in the series of reports on human resources management will take stock of and compare the situation in the organizations of the United Nations system in that regard and evaluate them in the light of existing best practices in international organizations and public and private institutions.

Part Two: Delegation of authority in human resources management

6. Once an organization has established a clear policy with regard to its post structure and related appointments, it should manage its staff flexibly through the development of a well-defined strategy for delegation of authority. A number of prerequisites have to be met in that connection, such as ensuring that managers possess the required qualifications and experience, and that a set of clear managerial principles and practices is adopted and implemented. The second in the series of reports will review the key elements on which delegation of authority should be based, as well as the related obligations of both staff members and managers. Since many organizations appear to be lacking such a coherent strategy for delegating authority, the Inspectors intend to examine best practices in that area within and outside the United Nations system with a view to offering implementable recommendations. The report will build on the findings of a previous report on the delegation of authority for management of human and financial resources in the United Nations Secretariat (JIU/REP/2000/6) (see A/55/857 and Add.1), which focused on the United Nations Secretariat, and whose recommendations were endorsed by the General Assembly.[1]

Part Three: Accountability and oversight in human resources management

7. Accountability and oversight are equally vital for effective human resources management, in particular with respect to authority delegated to programme managers. Concern has been voiced regarding the lack of an effective mechanism for accountability in human resources management in organizations of the United Nations system, and that the current system of administration of justice is not designed to remedy that shortcoming. Effective oversight should ensure that programme managers comply with established policies, guidelines and procedures in human resources management. This third report will review those issues and make concrete recommendations regarding the framework, conditions and mechanisms which can underlie a reliable system of accountability and oversight in the field of human resources management.

Part Four: Performance appraisal systems

8. The type of appointments granted, the extent to which authority can be delegated and accountability with regard to the ways in which that authority is exercised are all dependent on the existence of a reliable and fully operational performance management system. Job descriptions, contractual rights and obligations ensuing from the types of appointments granted as well as programmatic requirements should form the basis of individual and collective work plans of the staff members, their supervisors and the organizational units concerned, work plans which will, in turn, provide the basis for performance appraisal. Too many of the existing performance appraisal systems in United Nations organizations, however, are perceived to lack those essential linkages not only to programme management but even to other aspects of human resources management as well. The Inspectors therefore intend to examine the various performance appraisal systems presently operating in the United Nations system to verify the degree to which they are actually used to improve management and efficiency and relate to the other three pillars of human resources management identified above.

C. Status of implementation of results-based management in the United Nations system

9. A number of organizations of the United Nations system have initiated results-oriented reform processes with a view to improving their planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems and in order to cope more adequately with requirements for efficiency and accountability. As indicated in the preliminary listing (A/57/321, para. 19), the review will be based on a systematic consideration of the cycle in its entirety and will attempt to identify the impact of the implementation of the results-oriented approach on the whole cycle. The report will suggest ways to improve, within that framework, the current methodologies for planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of the organizations of the United Nations system with a view to assisting Member States and the organizations themselves in designing and reviewing results-based management systems as an effective managerial tool.

10. This item was originally included in the programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2000, at the suggestion of the secretariats of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Economic Commission

for Europe, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the International Maritime Organization, the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), but was postponed pending issuance of the interim report of the Secretary-General on results-based budgeting for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/57/478).

D. Knowledge management for results

11. Not all information is valuable, but some relevant information, selectively collated and analysed, becomes knowledge. Leveraging knowledge to improve management is vital for many of the United Nations system organizations to stay relevant in a rapidly changing international environment and in the face of emerging challenges in the twenty-first century. The United Nations system as a whole needs to build the capacity to create, manage and effectively use knowledge as one of its most valuable strategic resources. In particular, and coupled with a results-based approach, performance information throughout the planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation cycles should become knowledge that can be used for management and efficiency improvements.

12. In 2002, the Joint Inspection Unit issued a report on management information systems in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2002/9). Based on the findings and conclusions of that report, and as an extension of it, the Unit will now prepare a report focusing on the role of performance-related information or "knowledge" in results-based planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems. Thus, while the report on the status of implementation of results-based management, which is also included in the present programme of work (see section C above), will address the normative and institutional aspects of results-based management, this report will review practical aspects of knowledge-based performance management. It will address issues related to the collating and storing of performance information, the structuring and processing of such information and performance reporting to legislative organs.

13. The objectives of the report are to: (i) take stock of current knowledge-based performance management systems, in particular as they relate to results-based management; (ii) contribute to a common understanding and development of knowledge management for results; and (iii) make recommendations to improve the creation, sharing and application of knowledge aimed at performance and management improvements within selected participating organizations.

E. Procurement practices in the United Nations system

14. As indicated in the preliminary listing (A/57/321, paras. 21-23), the item on procurement practices in the United Nations has been included in the programme of work, based on the suggestions made by the secretariat of the World Food Programme to review procurement practices in the United Nations system, and by the secretariat of FAO that a system-wide review of electronic-procurement (e-procurement) be undertaken.

15. The review is designed to act as a catalyst to encourage greater coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system in the sharing of procurement information, with the aim of achieving the greatest possible efficiency and cost-effectiveness in procurement transactions. The review will cover policies and procedures adopted by the various organizations in the procurement of goods and services, and the coordination mechanisms that exist for the sharing of procurement information, including rosters of suppliers and blacklisted suppliers.

16. The review will also emphasize the status of e-procurement in the system, examining the potential benefits to be derived from a wider use of that facility and the merits of adopting a uniform approach in regard to it. Areas related to procurement activities that could benefit from wider and faster sharing of electronic-supported practices will be identified and proposals will be put forward for innovative, information and communication technology-driven procurement procedures.

F. Review of the United Nations budgetary process

17. The Secretary-General recently presented his agenda for further reform of the United Nations (A/57/387 and Corr.1), including the process of planning and budgeting which, in his view, is seriously flawed, because it is complex, protracted, disjointed, time-consuming and rigid. The purpose of the proposed reform would be to make planning and budgeting real strategic instruments in the service of the priorities and the programme of work of the Organization. Although several former and proposed Joint Inspection Unit reports (JIU/REP/2002/2 and JIU/REP/1999/3 (see A/54/287 and Add.1) in particular, as well as the report described in para. 9 above) have dealt, or will deal, with the issue of programming and budgeting at the United Nations, they have mainly addressed, or will mainly address, the issue of the implementation of a results-based approach to the process and an analysis of the process itself has yet to be conducted.

18. Therefore, this report will consist of a critical review of the present United Nations planning, programming, budgeting and evaluation cycle, which is excessively complex and labour-intensive. It will not focus on the methodological and technical aspects of the budgetary process, but rather on how the process itself can be simplified and made more effective and efficient for both the Secretariat and Member States.

G. Multilingualism in the United Nations system: case studies

19. In a main report issued in 2002, entitled "Multilingualism in the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2002/11), which covered common issues from a system-wide perspective, the Joint Inspection Unit indicated that a selected number of organizations would be the subject of case studies "so as to address more specific issues and concerns while drawing from best practices elsewhere" (ibid., para. 5). The report to be undertaken in 2003 will consist of such case studies.

20. The case studies will also focus on how the selected organizations have addressed the question of access to information in their particular fields of activities, in terms of languages used for that purpose. The first Joint Inspection Unit report referred to in paragraph 19 above underlined, inter alia, that "the usual delineation

between North and South or industrialized and developing nations is not the only dividing line between info-rich and info-poor, as language itself has become the "open Sesame" without which no access to the riches of the Information Age is possible" (ibid., para. 113). In that connection, due consideration will be given to views of Member States and other stakeholders in the preparatory process for the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society.

H. Review of administration and management at UNHCR

21. This report is the seventh in a series of comprehensive reviews of administration and management of different United Nations organizations conducted by the Unit in recent years: the International Labour Organization (1999), UNESCO (2000), the International Telecommunication Union (2001), WHO (2001), FAO (2002) and UNIDO (in preparation).

22. Like previous ones, the review will cover the areas of planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation; structure and decentralization; human resources management; management information systems; and external and internal oversight. In the preparation of this report, as in others, close coordination will be maintained with other relevant oversight bodies, in compliance with paragraph 12 of resolution 56/245.

I. Coherence for development: experience in selected countries

23. In order to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations development system at the country level, it is important to look at such issues as cooperation, coordination, harmonization, consistency and synergy. With the United Nations reform launched in 1997 having initiated a results-oriented culture, it is equally important to assess whether the results-based management approaches adopted by the various United Nations system actors active in development are in fact conducive to enhancing effective cooperation among them and ensuring country ownership of programmes. All development agencies have operational policies and procedural requirements that guide their relations with partner countries. Even when they share common objectives as set out in the outcomes of the major conferences and most prominently in the Millennium Declaration (see resolution 55/2), their specific requirements may differ to such an extent as to burden the partner countries excessively and impede their assuming such ownership. It is widely acknowledged that those complexities and differences do not lead to an optimal use of resources, as they engender transaction costs, lessen development effectiveness and drain the capacity of the partner countries, especially those of poorer and smaller partner countries.

24. Drawing on the lessons learned in the context of the Unit's report on "Reaching the international goal of primary education for all by 2015" (see A/57/61, paras. 5-7), currently in preparation, the new report will make an inventory of actions taken in the international development community to remove obstacles which impede optimal cooperation in full respect for the principle of ownership and partnership. It will look at the state of progress made to increase efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability and ways to reduce the burden of transaction costs for both Governments and the United Nations system.

25. The report will also evaluate the ongoing efforts of the international community to improve aid modalities and donor practices and examine actions undertaken within the context of the United Nations Development Group and in other forums, such as the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to simplify and harmonize donor programme practices for effective aid delivery in such areas as programme preparation, approval and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, financial rules and regulations and delegation of authority . The report will then analyse whether such developments should be progressively extended to all the funds and programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, based on a cost-benefit analysis. The report aims to inform the discussions and decision-making of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, particularly in the context of the triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (see resolution 56/201).

Notes

[1] See A/55/983, para. 9; see also *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 103rd meeting (A/55/PV.103). The General Assembly endorsed the recommendations of the report in its decision 55/481.